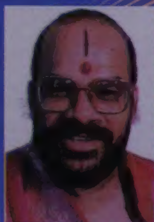
RIGVEDA-ASHWALAYANA AND SARASWAT BRAHMINS










BY
K. G. MALLYA

॥ॐ॥

भद्रं कर्णेभिः श्रृणुयाम देवा

भद्रं पश्येमाक्षभिर्यजत्राः ।

स्थिरैरंगैस्तुष्टुवाँसस्तनूभि

र्व्यशेम देवहितं यदायुः ॥

स्वस्ति न इन्द्रो वृद्धश्रवाः

स्वस्ति नः पूषा विश्ववेदाः ।

स्वस्ति नस्ताक्ष्यो अरिष्टनेमिः

स्वस्ति नो बृहस्पतिर्दधातु ॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om! O gods, may we hear auspicious words with the ears; while engaged in sacrifices may we see auspicious things with the eyes; while praising the gods with steady limbs, may we enjoy a life that is beneficial to the gods.

May Indra of ancient fame, be auspicious to us; may the supremely rich (or all-knowing) Pusa (god of the earth) be propitious to us; may Garuda, the destroyer of evil, be well disposed towards us; may Brahaspati ensure our welfare.

Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

(Rigveda)

RIGVEDA ASHWALAYANA AND SARASWAT BRAHMINS



K. G. MALLYA

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I Gratefully Remember

My Elder Brother, Late Shri K. Subraya Mallya,

My Father, Late Shri Devaraya Mallya,

My Grandfather, Late Shri Subraya Mallya, and

My Great-grandfather, Late Shri Devappa Mallya

and

My Brothers-in-Law,

Late Shri Agumbe Sheshagiri Pandit and

Late Shri P. Manjunath Shenoy

– K. G. Mallya

Cover Page

Our Dharma Gurus and Acharyas

(Left to Right)

H. H. Shrimat Sudhindra Thirtha Swamiji Kashi Math

H. H. Shrimat Satchidananda Saraswati Swamiji Kaivalya Math

H. H. Shrimat Vidyadhiraja Thirtha Swamiji Gokarna Math

H. H. Shrimat Sadyojat Shankarashram Swamiji Chitrapur Math

and

Pattashishya H. H. Srimat Raghavendra Thirtha Swamiji Kashi Math

Pattashishya H. H. Srimat Shivanand Sarswati Swamiji Kaivalya Math

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Contents :

1. INTRODUCTION

A casual survey of our past is quite enough to tell us that after a prolonged struggle against innumerable calamities, natural, political and religious, we have reached the present stage; whatever be the limitations or glories seen there.

When our ancestors lived on the banks of the River Saraswati they were Rishis performing the holy sacrifices to win the hearts of the vedic gods for the welfare of mankind and the universe. When the classical caste system of four divisions came into being, they became Brahmins, preserving and maintaining that order of Hinduism (which never is a religion, but a culture) under the protection and patronage of the monarchs who were ordained to protect cows and Brahmins. Because the Brahmins were wise, many kings sought their counsel and obeyed their commands and they were regarded almost as gods.

The holy river Saraswati, on the banks of which our forefathers dwelt, was subjected to a prolonged drought and the ocean-like river with thousands of streams gradually vanished. Although the river which was considered to be the life-blood of the community disappeared, our ancestors never lost courage. Forming themselves into many groups they migrated to various parts of the sub-continent that was Bharata Varsha. The sub-continent, at that time was divided into fiftysix countries – but as our ancestors, the Saraswat Brahmins, were renowned for their wisdom and intelligence, the political boundaries never prevented their journeys. They then considered Bharata Khanda as one continent or one land and so they moved with freedom to various parts of Bharat. It is said that when they lived in Tirhut (a part of the present Bihar which was a part of the Gowda Desha) Lord Parashurama a Saraswat himself invited them to stay at Gomantaka (Goa).

Here the journey was not of a day or two and it took them a few decades to settle down premanently in Goa and during their journey to Goa, the Saraswat Brahmins came into contact with Magadhi and Oriya tongue and thus a new language to be known later as Konkani took shape, which they carried with them to Goa. Because of their stay in the Gowda Desha (the present Bihar and Bengal) a prefix of 'Gowda' became a part of their nomanclature. So it is the voyage from the Saraswat country to Goa en-route the Gowda Desha that brought our community the group name of Gowda Saraswat Brahmins with Konkani as our spoken language.

Times Changed :

In Goa our people took to trade and commerce and the life there underwent a complete economic and social revolution, and added an all round prosperity to our community's life.......

All of us still remember with great terror the Portuguese inquisition. The memory of their ruthless and forcible conversion to Christianity is still fresh in our minds though this happened around 16th Century.

To save and protect our religion, we had to flee fromGoa for ever and settle down on the coastal belt of the western India where we had the shelter and patronage of the local Hindu kings. Again times changed and with the changing times the necessity of earning livelihood scattered the community all over the country.

What we are to-day is the reward of the struggle of our ancestors in the days of yore against heavy odds. Each nerve and each cell and each corpuscle or our blood is moulded and shaped by the courage and character, qualities and virtues, strength and stamina, religious faith and spiritual essence of our ancestors.

We are the brave sons of River Saraswati. We are the famous Saraswat Brahmins who are the disciples of Saraswat Muni

(the son of the Saraswati) who preserved the vedas for posterity. We have a glorious past of which we can always be proud.

When we had reached the summit of cultural advancement in life, scores of other communities in the world were wandering in the jungles in search of sustenance without having even the rudiments of knowledge. Even in those days when other human communities had not attained the knowledge of using fire, our forefathers were advanced enough to divise the symbol of God in fire and utilise it for the first religious functions of Yajnas or sacrificial rituals.

To-day we live in the modern world - the most advanced one the mankind has ever seen. Yet the glory of our past has never faded. We are still the torch-bearers of the ideals for which our ancestors lived and here are some of our dominant qualities :

God-fearing :

God is an inseparable part of our life from time immemorial and whatever be our actions, we perform for His glory. Even to this day we have full faith in Him and we desist from wicked deeds which the Dharma never approves. All our feasts and festivals are for His remembrance and whenever we embark on any venture, first we pray to Him for its successful conclusion. We have a pantheon of thirty three crores of deities and the main feature of our community is we never discriminate between gods of any 'Pantha' and we always seek a healthy compromise between the ways of different cults. To give but one example, although we borrowed the worship of snakes from the Dravidas, those who are Vaishnavas worship as the descendants of Adi Shesha, the carrier of Lord Vishnu and those who are Smarthas worship as Shankarabharana - the ornament of Lord Siva's. When the local tribes, - to whose territory we had migrated, - worshipped

ghosts, we spared no time in worshipping ghosts too in addition to our Kuladevas, Gramadevas, Ishtadevas and Aradhyadevas. Even to this day when man worships atom and space we have in our homes miniature idols of deities before whom every day we light lamps and pray.

Peace-loving :

We are always a peace-loving people though we are courageous. Although peace is the ultimate aim of our life, we never have been cowards. We have definitely inherited this divine quality from our ancestors, who were the real lovers of all the living beings in the universe. Even to this day are we not praying, "May the universe fare well !" and "Om, Peace, Peace and Peace!"

Unity in diversity :

Diversified thinking is a human nature to which our community is not an exception. But we maintain the feeling of oneness and unity at all times. Although on certain occasions we might remain separate from one another for sometime due to differences of opinion, sooner than later, we forget and forgive and join together. We are always full of love and affection. No sooner than we meet an unknown member of our community we begin talking in our mother tongue, Konkani and venture to trace out family connections, if any. How happy we will be when we come to know that our new found friend turns to be a relative of our family in one way or another. After all we are all brothers; the kinsmen in a single community. The feasts and festivals provide wide opportunities for social gatherings and our temples give opportunities to work together and thus, these fields serve to foster unity.

Hard-working :

We are always a hard working and industrious community. None of our members is lazy. Whatever our limitations and difficulties be, we put in every effort to make an honest living. We are intelligent, honest, efficient and always ingenious in our ways.

Faith in religion :

As Hinduism embraces all aspects of the ideals of life, even to this day we have a firm faith in our religion. Kingdoms rose and kingdoms fell, a number of alien invasions led to merciless and coercive conversions, but because our ancestors withstood all these aggressions and defended their religion with all their might, the glorious name of Saraswat Brahmins has survived with us (Gowda Saraswat and Saraswat belong to one and the same clan). If bread was the only aim of our life we would have forsaken our religion long ago ! When this is our history, how can we be without faith in religion ?

Dynamic personality :

The personality of our community is a dynamic one. We have shaped ourselves with the changing times. Even to-day adaptation to the changing environments is the only key to our survival and success. We were priests on the banks of Saraswati but in Goa we became traders, without forgetting our past customs, which we will never give up. It is often said (may be ironically) that we left Goa to save our tuft of hair, but to-day only a few of us can boast of that convention. Voluntarily did we give up our tufts of hair. As mentioned earlier we always try to seek a healthy compromise between the changing times and the tradition.

Fondness of the past :

Although ours is a dynamic outlook, we are preservers of our old customs. Every boy in our community is initiated into Brahma Vidya (Upanayanam) however indigent he might be. The present day "Upanayana" is celebrated on the same pattern that was laid down thousands of years ago. The "yajnopavita" (janwa) which would be put on, on this occasion will become a part of our personality till death although many of us do not know its exact significance. As in the past, the child will be named on the twelfth day after its birth and we still believe in the ancient institution of Pitris. On the thirteenth day of a person's death, we take it that he will ascend Vaikunta only after the son performs the prescribed rites. The "mangala sootra", a special ornament by which the bridegroom sanctifies the vow of marriage with the bride at the time of marriage, is still the most sacred ornament to our ladies even in this age of fashionable ornaments. Our ancestors believed that Guru is the personified Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara unified, and to this day we consider the worship of our Gurus (whom we call Swamijis) is the obeisance to the trinity .....

Our Religious Seats :

We have in our community four religious seats : Kaivalya, Kashi, Gokarna and Chitrapur headed by H.H. Satchidananda Saraswati Swamiji, H.H. Sudhindra Thirtha Swamiji, H.H. Vidyadhiraj Thirtha Swamiji and H.H. Sadyojat Shankarshram Swamiji respectively. All the four Maths are independent of each other and each has its own glorious story to tell. The pontiffs of these Maths are the real torch-bearers of Hinduism and they are responsible for the survival of religious faith in our community.

The available historical records state that in the days of yore we had only one Math, the Kaivalya Math. With the emigra-

tion of the community members from Goa to the sourthern region of the country, to save our religious indentity and keep the lamp of our faith burning, the need for three more Swamijis was felt and therefore Gokarna Math, Kashi Math and Chitrapur Math came to be established.

Although our Swamijis are four in number, they are one in outlook and their example of unity in thought, action and speech deserves to be followed by every one of us. In line with our parents they whole-heartedly desire that our community should prosper in all directions of life including the spiritual aspect of it. Three times a day they offer pujas to God and pray for the prosperity of all the members of the community in particular and all the human beings in general. They have renounced the wordly life for our sake and is it not a great indebtedness which we can repay only by following their divine dictates ?

The world is moving fast and we too with it. The world is changing rapidly and we too with it. The world is not waiting for anybody and for us also it will not wait.

To-day we stand at the threshold of the Third Millennium, with a great hope, enthusiasm and optimism that the things will change and the change is always for the better and to our advantage. After 5000 years of survival and keeping our identity in tact, from here where should we go now ? This question needs to be answered by all the Saraswats honestly. To enable us to do it, it is better we look back at the teachings and ideals of our forefathers and this book is a modest attempt in this direction.

Mumbai.
Deepavali, — ***K. G. Mallya***
Sunday the 7th Nov., 1999

2. RIGVEDA

Vedas are the ancient most books of India. They are four in number called Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda and fascinated by their catholic outlook and the message of the universal brotherhood, western scholars like Max Muller wholeheartedly praised them as the first books of the human race and to-day the vedas are regarded as the heritage of not only the Indian people but also of the mankind as a whole.

Etymologically the word "veda" means knowledge and the vedas are regarded as the most valuable treasure of knowledge of our country. They are our most sacred books and they form the very basis and foundation of our religion, our culture, and our thinking and interestingly enough, on our lives their influence is so great that we cannot think of living even for one day, even in this age of atoms and computers. The central theme of the vedas is to lead man towards more meaningful, purposeful and useful life and therefore they are always eternal and at the same time new and fresh.

The Birth of Vedas :

The Purusha Sukta in the 10th Mandala of Rigveda (10.90) also appearing in other three vedas tells us that this universe or creation came out of a great sacrifice in which the Lord Almighty dedicated Himself as an oblation and from that sacrifice along with the things and beings came the vedic mantras. Here the sacrifice does not mean the one with the flames of fire but a deliberate action done wth the spirit of sacrifice giving away something without expecting anything in return. Thus for the benefit and guidance of human beings the holy word was created by God which echoed from time to time in the hearts of the sages. Thus the vedas are not authored by human beings but by

God Himself and the sages or the wisemen only "saw"them or "heard" them. For this reason the sage was called a seer or a "drishtrar" and the vedas as "shrutis" that which were heard from the inner voice. The sages themselves do not claim the authorship of the mantras although they might have given to the mankind in the form of intricate verses.

Mantras :

The sacred writings of the vedas are always called the mantras and not shlokas or stanzas, as they are supposed to have been packed with supernatural powers. Each and every mantra is dedicated to a particular deity, composed in a particular form of prosody and has a rishi who had seen it. Before chanting a mantra one has to remember, the deity, the rishi and the prosody and then one has to prefix "Om" or "Hari Om" and on completion, the mantra should have a suffix of "Om". This is to maintain the sanctity of the holy word as it is believed that it had come out of the very mouth of the Lord Almighty Himself. It is believed that when the mantra is chanted in the prescribed manner, the deity addressed in the mantra will manifest and grant the boon.

The Unwritten Books :

Rigveda is in the the form of poetry, Yajurveda - prose, Atharvaveda - the mixture of both while Samaveda is a collection of mantras from Rigveda, excepting 75 of its own, set to music to be sung during various sacrifices. The word Sama means music and the Indian classical music originated from this veda. It is stated that God is a great lover of Sama Music.

Going by their utility, besides a storehouse of knowledge Rigveda contains Riks or mantras to be chanted at various rituals, havans and sacrifices whereas Yajurveda contains "Yajus"

or the formulae for performing and conducting sacrifices and Yajnas. Samaveda is devoted to music but Atharvaveda is basically concerned with the personal happiness. Many of the mantras here are to ward off illness, old-age, pain, poverty, enemy, natural calamities and also wars and famines. Once a man rises above these miseries then Atharvaveda has great many things to tell : From universal brotherhood to very lofty philosophical ideas and ideals.

It is stated that originally there was only one veda consisting of one lakh of mantras, which were transmitted from generation to generation by a father to his son or by a guru to his shishya by oral tradition by rote or by memory to be chanted in the same original form and pattern. However, diligence and hard work was on the decline with the passage of time and the values of life also changed. A time came when this spiritual wealth got reduced to almost 1/5 of its original size (4/5 has gone for ever from the face of the earth) and even this lay scattered in different places with different families. At that time Maharshi Bhagwan Shri Vedavyasa arrived on the scene and taking a lot of pains he collected all the mantras and thereafter divided into four groups depending upon their nature and utility and gave back to the mankind in the form of four sacred books retaining all the characterstics of the mantras in the original form. The four volumes that we see to-day are the result of his hard work and farsightedness, 5,000 years ago. After making this division, Shri Vyasa taught four of his disciples, Paila, Vaishampayana, Jaimini and Sumantu, the four newly created books, Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda respectively and asked them to teach and propagate only one each to the deserving students, as by then, it was proved that human beings laden with many worldly problems were incapable of mastering all the four vedas. Then basing on their requirement and liking the later generations se-

lected a group of mantras from each one of these vedas and called them a particular branch of the veda. In the process some more mantras were left out. Thus for Rigveda we have only two "Shakhas" called Shakala and Bhashkala and Shakala is supposed to be easily available and more popular. Many of the Saraswat Brahmins have Rigveda as their prime veda and that too of Shakala Branch. There are Saraswat Brahmins who have Yajurveda as their principal veda and even in the Yajurveda, Madhyandina Shakha is popular with them.

Chanting of Vedas :

For the chanting and propagation of vedas there are many restrictions as they are supposed to be packed with supernatural powers and this being so, their wrong handling or their being in wrong hands could create more harm than the benefit to the society as a whole. Therefore in ancient times, people were careful in imparting the knowledge of vedas. Basically one should have the desire and thereafter one should deserve as there were very strict commandments that vedas should not be written down, nor be read out and with regard to chanting also they should not be chanted publicly if the place is not suitable and similarly the audience. While chanting they should be chanted in the same original form and before chanting one must know the full meaning of the mantra and without knowing one must never, never venture to chant. The vedas are meant for spreading the knowledge about God and His Greatness and therefore in Yajurveda (Ch.26.1.2) there is a commandment that the vedic message should be spread and propagated amongst all classes of people cutting across the barriers of the caste, creed and community.

Times have changed now. One cannot live on chanting and propagating the vedas. But still there are institutions that teach vedas even if there are a handful of students. Printed books are

available and if one does not know Sanskrit, he can go through the translations and get to know the lofty ideas and ideals of our forefathers who had lived thousands of years ago. Incidentally the first three vedas, Rik, Yajus, and Sama see the beautiful and brighter side of the life and call upon the human beings to have a strong desire to live a full life of one hundred years along with wife, sons, grandsons and great grandsons whereas Atharvaveda portrays the negative side of the life tainted with ailments, poverty, hardships etc and here the life seems to be a constant struggle against odds but interestingly all the four vedas put to-gether enjoin upon human beings to enjoy the life following the eternal law and there is not a single trace of advice asking people to run away from the scene and take to sanyas. There is no negative approach nor there is a scope for a negative thought. "The life is beautiful, enjoy and live through it, now and here and in this world only and nowhere else", is the essence of all the four sacred books, called "Samhitas".

The Size of the Volumes :

The four vedas consist the following number of mantras :

Rigveda	:	10,552
Yajurveda	:	2,086
Samaveda	:	1,875
and Atharvaveda	:	5,987
Total	**:**	**20,500**

Significance :

What is the significance of vedas in the modern times ? The answer is vedas are eternal in time and modern in outlook. On no occasion they preach the renunciation of the world and retirement to the forest unless the age is ripe. To sum up, we can quote from the concluding Chapter of Sukla Yajurveda as

follows :

> "All that we see, both moving and unmoving is covered by God (God is all pervasive). Renounce (selfishness) and enjoy the life without coveting and desiring the wealth of others (Be satisfied with what you have). Performing your duties devoutly, have a strong desire to live a useful life of one hundred years. By performing or attending to the duties expected of you, you will never become a sinner and this is the only way out for you, having taken a birth on this Earth" (Shukla Yajurveda Ch 40.1 & 2)

Rigveda :

Rigveda, the first among the four vedas has the largest collection of mantras. Quite a few mantras from Rigveda are borrowed by other vedas and historically it is believed to be the most ancient one and contents-wise also it is the very mine of knowledge, both spiritual and temporal although many of the mantras outwardly appear to be prayers and group songs, advice and commandments. However wise one may be or whatever be one's spiritual attainments and knowledge, he has to obey the commandments of the vedas and no earthly power has the authority to question them as they are the commandments of the Creator Himself.

The greatest beauty of the poetry in Rigveda is that great knowledge is packed in tiny verses which at times convey different meaning to different people in different times depending upon their level of thinking and understanding. The poets are the sages of the yore who it seems, were gifted with a tremendous capacity of knowing the past, the present and the future and the mantras contain the truth eternal that cannot and will not change with the passage of time or with the change in the outlook of man or the values in life.

The Great Sages :

A cursory look at the Rigveda indicates that the mantras here are by many seers belonging to different families of seers and sometimes three to four generations of the same family have contributed significantly towards vedic literature. For example, we have the mantras by the sage Vasishtha, his son Shakti, and grandson Parashara. Vishwamitra, a Kshatriya becomes a Brahmin and composes mantras for the Rigveda. His sons too later on compose mantras. The most celebrated Gayatri Mantra is given by the sage Vishwamitra. There are women seers like Vishwavara and a shudra-rishi called Kavasha. "Let noble thoughts come to us from every side" (Rigveda 1.89.1) is the spirit of Rigveda and the ancient sages were not going by caste or creed.

The Rigveda is divided into ten Mandalas or divisions and they are as follows :

			Mantras	By Sages
First Mandala		:	2006	. . Various sages.
Second	"	:	429	. . Family of the sage. Gritsamada.
Third	"	:	617	. . " Vishwamitra.
Fourth	"	:	589	. . " Vamadeva
Fifth	"	:	727	. . " Atri
Sixth	"	:	765	. . " Bharadwaj
Seventh	"	:	841	. . " Vasishtha
Eighth	"	:	1716	. . " Pragatha, Kanva & Angirasa
Nineth	"	:	1108	. . Various sages but the mantras are dedicated to one single deity, Somapavamana
Tenth	"	:	1754	. . Various rishis on various subjects.
Total		..	**10552**	

Intricate Poetry :

In addition to their vast knowledge the vedic rishis were gifted poets who could compose in intricate metres different forms of poems. The smallest metre is Gayatri which has three lines - each line consisting of barely eight letters. The sacred Gayatri Mantra is composed in this metre. In Rigveda there are 2467 mantras in this metre. However, the most popular metre seems to be Trishtup which has four lines with eleven letters in each line. There are 4253 mantras in Trishtup metre. Vedic rishis have made use of 14 types of metres the smallest being Gayatri with 24 letters and the longest is Atidhriti with 76 letters. But in the entire Rigveda there is only one Atidhriti verse.

Deities :

Rigveda gives us 33 deities - 11 each stationed in three places : Water, Earth and Sky. (R.1.139.11) :

Water : Indra, Trita, Apannapaat, Matarishwa, Ahirbudhnya, Ajayekapaat, Rudra, Marut, Vayu, Parjanya and Apa.

Earth : Agni, Prithvi, Brihmanaspati, Dhenu, Soma, Aushadhi, Vastoshpati, Ila, Rita, Ritu and Raatri.

Firmament : Surya, Dyavh, Varuna, Mitra, Savita, Pushan, Vishnu, Vivaswan, Aditya, Usha and Ashwins.

Ultimately these 33 deities expanded into 33 crores and these deities in each one of them have one aspect or the other of the Soul Supreme and therefore we need not confuse ourselves with their number or names as, one of the vedic rishis has made a bold statement very clearly "Ekam Sat Vipra Bahuda Vadanti" which means God is one but the wise call them by different names. (R.1.164.46). Outwardly the vedic deities may look like the forces of nature like wind, water, fire or rain but the inner spirit is to recognise the very source of all the power from which the respective forces draw their strength. If we worship sun as god it is not

the orb that is visible to us but something beyond the sun. The very source of energy the sun draws from, is worshipped as God. The mode of worship in the vedic times was by performing sacrifices with the conviction that whatever is offered into the flames of fire, the fire-god or Agni will carry to gods. Agni is one of the most popular deities but Indra is the hero among the vedic gods.

Gayatri Mantra :

Although all the mantras in Rigveda are the holy words of which none is high or low in power and potence, the Gayatri has a special place in the vedic literature. We can come across with this mantra in the Third Mandala as the tenth mantra in the 62nd Sukta. The sage is Vishwamitra and the metre is Gayatri and the deity of the mantra is the most gracious one - Savita, the sun-god or the presiding deity of the sun. Because of 'Sandhi' or the combination of words in the mantra the name of the deity Savita, is hidden and many of us will be surprised to-day if we state that the deity to whom the mantra is addressed is Savita, an ancient god of India.

Vishwamitra was a Kshatriya by birth but became a Brahmin later (which was considered to be an achievement of highest order those days) by chanting only the Gayatri Mantra. Therefore even today this is one mantra that is taught without any exception to a Brahmin vatu at the time of thread ceremony.

Three Dimensions :

Gayatri Mantra has three dimensions. The metre in which it is composed is called Gayatri, ie. three lines with eight letters each and this is the smallest metre in the poetry of Rigveda and all other metres are the extension of Gayatri Metre with more letters and more lines. Therefore in respect of prosody, Gayatri is regarded as the Mother of Prosody.

Lord Brahma, Creator's consort is Gayatri and as she is supposed to be the Mother of vedas, before one chants the Gayatri Mantra, one has to invoke her blessings. Here again Gayatri Mantra is regarded as the Mother of Vedas as the mantra is supposed to be the tiniest condensation of all the four vedas. As stated earlier the deity of the mantra is Savita who gives strength and energy to all the living beings from morning till evening everyday during the course of the sun.

While chanting this mantra "Om" is prefixed and then there will be three more words, "Bhoo, Bhuva nad Swaha" which are called "vyahriti" indicating, the earth, firmament and the heaven to suggest that the Lord Almighty is pervading all these three regions. The mantra proper states in simple words that we meditate upon the adorable glory and brilliance of Lord Savita to stimulate our mental power of highest order. ("Dhee Shakti" is supposed to be the greatest mental power any human being can think of as it is the basis of enlightenment. Gayatri is great only because through this prayer no wealth or earthly possessions are sought for like many other mantras. Incidentally while the first three vedas have in them the sacred Gayatri Mantra, Atharvaveda does not contain it but there is a beautiful mantra addressed to Mother Goddess Gayatri which depicts that by chanting Gayatri regularly one will remain pure besides getting longevity, progeny, wealth, fame, health, happiness and the brilliance and lustre of Brahma. After granting all these boons, the Mother Gayatri will take the devotee to Brahmaloka leading by hand and present him to the very Lord Himself. When we are taught Gayatri Mantra and when we know how to chant it, by spending a few moments in the daily routine, if we are going to get whatever we want should we not try in this direction ? A Brahmin is supposed to chant the sacred Gayatri at least 10 times a day.

Opening and Concluding Hymns :

Rigveda opens with a mantra addressed to Agni, the fire-god. It states,

> "I pray to Agni, the priest, the deity of sacrifice, the singer of mantras, the offerer of oblations and the best giver of treasure." (1.1.1)

The concluding mantra is a commandment ordaining,

> "Walk together, Talk together and Act with One mind. Just as the devas of the ancient times took together the offerings, may your aim be common, assembly be common and being united in mind and thoughts, worship with common oblation. With your hearts united for common aim may your minds be one so that all will live together happily." (10.191).

True, throughout Rigveda, Agni is in the centre of worship by our forefathers. They regarded him as their friend, philosopher and guide besides the deity of daily worship, always in their presence when there were no temples nor idols to worship. They regarded Agni as a messenger of God acting as a bridge between the humanity and divinity. Viewing differently civilisation dawned with the use of fire and so the fire-god deserves to be saluted first. Then the survival of human beings depends on the spirit of oneness and unity, in any society, at any point of time. Therefore the song of unity needs a special place to draw the attention of everyone. "Without unity, the human race will perish," and this seems to be the ultimate message of our wise-men of the ancient times which holds good not only today but also thousands and thousands of years hence. That is the beauty and the greatness of the vedas.

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3. ASHWALAYANA GRIHYA SUTRAS

The sage Ashwalayana known for his celebrated work, Ashwalayana Sutras was a disciple of the great sage Shaunaka of the mythological fame. In almost all the puranas it was Shaunaka who at the beginning of the purana, requests Suta Puranik to narrate the stories in their 'jnana satra' or conferences performed for a period 1000 years in the Naimisha forest. Those were the days when people wanted to garner the spiritual knowledge instead of the material wealth and the conferences and the conventions or the meetings and the studies by the enlightened souls were taking place for a long period of time, sometimes months and sometimes even years to be termed as 1000 years. In all such programmes every day during the forenoon, people used to perform yajnas and havans and in the after-noon sufficient time was devoted to share the knowledge. When we say that Shaunaka's name is appearing in the puranas as a contemporary of Suta Puranik the disciple of the Great Master, Maharshi Bhagwan Vedavyasa, we can declare with certainty that Ashwalayana - who formulated the rules and regulations for the performance of domestic ceremonies, rites and rituals as a householder by making use of the domestic fire nurtured at home - also lived in that age. The sutras must have been shaped when the civilisation moved from the Saraswati Valley to the Gangetic belt and that too after many centuries later when they settled down comfortably there. We can date the Sutras to Mahabharata period if we relate Ashwalayana to Shaunaka and Suta Puranik. When we say most of the Saraswats are the followers of the Ashwalayana Sutras there is nothing wrong in our taking Ashwalayana as one of our earliest Acharyas.

The scope of Ashwalayana Sutras :

By the word 'sutra' we mean a formula and 'grihya', domestic and a sutra is always brief so that it will be easy to remember and memorise besides acting as a commandment. This book contains 4 chapters or 'Adhyayas' 54 Kandikas or paragraphs and 760 sutras. The first chapter has 24 Kandikas and 315 sutras, the second, 10 Kandikas and 124 sutras, the third, 12 Kandikas and 123 sutras and the fourth and the last one 8 Kandikas and 198 sutras. Before taking up the sutras for study we must remind ourselves that we are going back in time may be 5000 years when there were no temples and no idols. The family was an important unit of the society and the mankind was yet to know that centuries later there was going to be a thing called a matchbox to carry in the pockets to generate fire any time when one wished. People were very simple, god-fearing, large-hearted and their vision and approach to life was very positive and noble. They were very compassionate and helpful and had profound knowledge, both mundane and spiritual. They had quite a few domestic ceremonies during the change in seasons and in their own hearth and home they used to worship God by making offerings in the flames of fire. There were occasions when they performed sacrifices outside the villages and they used to perform animal sacrifices also to ward off the evil spirits or for fulfilling their desires. This, however was occasional. Their favourite deity was Agni and in a few places, Lord Shiva is invoked. Lord Vishnu is not a prominent deity though his name appears in the 'tarpana' ritual. When we say that the sutras are for the benefit of the householder, definitely the welfare of the family is borne in mind in every action and deed. Therefore, marriage, conception, childbirth, naming ceremony, giving solid food to the child for the first time after its birth, first hair cutting, upanayanam, sending

the vatu to the gurukula for being educated, re-entry into the family after education, house construction, repair, maintenance of the house periodically, agriculture, journey by chariot, funeral services and rites, annual shraddha ceremony for the dead etc. are the essential contents. While we go through the book we will be wonder-struck that consciously or unconsciously without knowing their back-ground or intricacies, we follow them even to this day in one way or the other. The unfortunate aspect is that today we do not have amidst us the competent teachers or the priests to tell us the significance of the rituals ordained in the sutras to appreciate them better.

Sutras Proper :

All of us are aware that as per our scriptures there are sixteen 'samkskars' an individual is supposed to go through during his life-time They are 1. Garbhadan, 2. Pumsavan, 3. Seemanthonayan, 4. Jatakarma, 5. Namakarana, 6. Nishkramana, 7. Annaprashana, 8. Choodakarma, 9. Yajnopaveeta, 10. Vedarambha, 11. Samavartan, 12. Vivaha, 13. Grihapatya, 14. Vanaprastha, 15. Sanyasya and 16. Anthyesti. The human life is divided into four Ashrams or periods and the first eight samskaras cover the childhood, the next three, Brahmacharya Ashram serial number 12 and 13 Grihasta Ashram 14 Vanaprastha Ashram, 15 Sanyas Ashram and like this the four periods of life are covered and the last one takes place soon after the death of a person. However, after centuries we have retained only the following few : Garbhadan, Cradling or naming ceremony, upanayanam, marriage or panigrahanam and finally the funeral or cremation with rituals associated with it. Ashwalayana has given several sutras for these and we shall study in brief what he has to say.

Marriage :

According to Ashwalayana, marriage has to be celebrated during the northern course of the sun-uttarayana- on an auspicious day under a good nakshatra, during Sukla Paksha. It can be at any time or any day subject to the above conditions. Before the wedding, the bridegroom or the bride's side should verify the credentials of the family both from father's and mother's side. The bride should show the qualities of intelligence, beauty and moral conduct and character and she should be free from diseases. If it is difficult to ascertain the qualities, the bridegroom must make eight lumps of earth collected from different places and ask the would be bride to select anyone of them. If she selected the soil from the farm that had two crops in a year, her offspring would be rich in food, if from a stable of a cow, rich in cattle, if from a yajnavedi, rich in lustre, if from a pool that does not dry up, rich in everything, if from a gambling place, she would be habituated to gambling, if from the place where roads meet she would be roaming in different directions, if from a barren spot poor, if from a burial ground she would bring death to her husband. Incidentally there is no mention of matching of horoscopes and it appears those days they were very particular only about the family back-ground as per Adhyaya 1, Kandika 5, Sutras 1 to 5. Sutra 2 enjoins the parents that the daughter should be married to a youngman endowed with intelligence.

In Kandika 6, Sutra 1 to 8 Ashwalayana gives us a list of eight types of marriages-Brahma-girl's father giving away as a gift or a daana; Daiva-giving away the daughter to an officiating priest when a sacrifice is going on; Prajapatya-to fulfil the law; Arsha, the bridegroom giving a bull and a cow to the girl's father for giving away the daughter; Gandharva-both the lover and the lass deciding to marry each other (love marriage of the modern times) ; Asura-paying money to the girl's father to give away his

daughter, Paishacha - carrying the bride off while the relatives sleep or without paying them attention (eloping?) and finally Raksasa-carrying away the bride overpowering or killing the relatives while she is reluctant for the wedding. (This is the worst from of wedding which any civilised society can tolerate).

The Brahma type of wedding is the most ideal among all and we follow the same. Ashwalayana states that a son born out of this marriage brings purification to twelve descendants and also to twelve ancestors on both the husband's and wife's sides. The ceremony takes place by giving away the daughter decked with ornaments and pouring out a libation of water. Even after centuries this system is being followed meticulously known as kanyadaan when the mother pours water on the hands of the father as part of the oblation to give away their daughter in marriage. Once this ceremony is over then the bride officially belongs to the groom. We shall pause here for a while and have a look at the bride decked with ornaments. Excepting here, Ashwalayana nowhere mentions about the silk or gold or the costly gifts to be exchanged and dowry to be given or taken. He is not mentioning about the feast or banquet to be given although in someother ceremonies he mentions about the feeding of Brahmins, as a part of the ceremony.

Ashwalayana's concept of wedding is simple and is hovering round love, affection, devotion and dedication between the husband and the wife so that they could understand and set themselves to the sacred duty of rearing a good family. Bearing this in mind in Kandika 7 from Sutra 1 to 27 he tells us about three important steps in the ceremony called panigrahana or seizing the palm of the bride. But before proceeding he cautions us that there are different customs in different places but the commonly accepted ones only he would relate :

Panigrahana :

Sutra 3 of Kandika 7 states that the bridegroom should stand with his face turned west and the bride should sit with her face to the east and at that time he should seize her hand chanting that he seizes the hand for the sake of happiness but while seizing, if he seizes the thumb of the bride it has to be taken that he desires to have only the male children from her and if he holds other fingers he desires to have female childern and if he holds the hand on the side where there is hair with the thumb then it should be understood that he desires to have both the male and female children. To-day our purohits ask the bridegroom to lead the bride invariably holding the thumb but without telling in advance what to do and what each action will mean. After seizing the thumb or fingers as the case may be the bridegroom would lead the bridge thrice round the fire chanting the mantra, "I am the heaven and you are the earth. I am Sama Mantra and you are Rik. Come ! Let us marry and beget the offspring. Loving each other may we live for one hundred autumns (years)." Everytime whenever they go round the fire in the havan, he would make her tread on a stone kept nearby with the words, "Tread on this stone and be firm like a stone. Overcome the enemies and tread the foes down."

Lajya Homa :

This homa is performed by the bride herself when her brother or a person acting on behalf of the brother, puts fried grain on the bride's joined hands to be offered to the fire in the homa to receive the blessings from the deities like Aryaman, Agni, Varuna and Pushan with invocation to release the bride from their bonds. The bride has to go round the flames each time after she had poured the fried grain. This homa is called "layye shawl" in Konkani when a shawl is given as a gift by the bridegroom to the brother of the bride for leading his sister while performing this particular homa.

Saptapadi :

Saptapadi or the seven steps is the most important step in the marriage ceremony when the bridegroom causes the bride to take seven steps in the north-eastern direction with the chanting of mantras meaning, "we shall remain united for ever with friendship and devotion for each other begetting many sons who would reach old age". Literally the chants convey as follows : "For sap with one step, for juice with two steps, for thriving of wealth with three steps, for comfort with four steps, for offspring with five steps, for the seasons with six steps and be friend with seven steps. Throughout the life may you be devoted to me. Let us acquire many sons who would reach old age." Stated differently, it is through the saptapadi that the newly wed couple would take an oath to live together, devoted, dedicated and loving each other throughout the life sharing with the wealth and joy begetting the offspring that would reach the ripe old age which means healthy children.

In all these rituals, the mantras chanted are the age-old ones drawn from the vedas, and prescribed by the sages of the days of yore.

At night the new bride is invariably shown the Polar Star, Sapta Rishi Mandal and also the star Arundhati who happened to be a great 'pativrita' to be taken as model by the bride. After beholding this star in particular the bride has to break the silence and announce and say, "May my husband live long and may I get offspring !"

The entire marriage ceremony in those days was held in the presence of Agni in the havana kunda revered as an important and popular deity and even to-day the rituals of panigrahana, lajya homa and saptapadi are taking place as they were, thousands of years ago. But, unfortunately to-day we rush through these important stages in the ceremony spending more time on

the banquets, exchange of pleasantries and show of wealth, forgetting that ultimately it is the couple that has to lead a good and useful life for years and years loving each other as life partners. Somewhere in the middle of the ceremony we have to spare sometime and explain to the couple the significance of various rituals so that marriage ceremony becomes more meaningful and educative laying a strong foundation for the future life.

Fire-god in the new abode :

In Kandika 8 Ashwalayana stipulates that if the couple has to travel soon after the wedding, they must carry the nuptial fire in front and thereafter throughout their life they must worship and allow it to burn and on no occasion the flames should be extinguished. After giving the fire a proper and suitable place in their dwelling house, the newly wed couple are ready to start their married life. But to get a good progeny they must observe chaste life, sleep on the ground for three to twelve nights and if they live for a year observing chaste life, a rishi will be born as their son.

Kandika 9 ordains that the domestic fire should be worshipped and should not be allowed to die out after the wedding. The householder himself should worship and in his absence his wife, and in her, the son and in the son's absence, daughter and if all the four are away, then the pupil should tend the fire.

Those were the days when there were no match-boxes and so fire had to be carefully preserved and maintained. And then there were no temples and idols. Therefore the domestic fire itself was everything to them . But interestingly, Ashwalayana believed that if Grihapati the householder, is away from the home, Grihalaxmi his wife, should be in charge, and only thereafter the son.

Even the daughter had a role to play in the worship of fire

when others were not at hand and with this it is the responsibility of the family as a whole to keep the flames burning for ever. Really a very good arrangement.

Some More Samskaras :

Kandika 14 touches upon Simantonnayana a ritual meant for the pregnant woman in the 4th month of pregnancy and Kandika 15 tells us how to name the new born child. The learned Ashwalayana says in case of men the name should have the syllables in even number and in the case of women uneven. Kandika 16 tells us how in the 6th month of the child Annaprasana or the first feeding of the solid food should take place. Kandika 17 describes the Choula Ceremony in the third year, and Kandika 19 tells us that upanayanam for a Brahmin boy should take place at the age of eight. Then he gives a "Do's and Don't's" list to the student elaborately and definitely the students those days were expected to work hard to come up to the expectations of the "guru". The students were not awarded any marks or rank and the ultimate aim of education was to see that the student would turn out to be a good citizen to face the world and also to reach great heights bringing name not only to himself but also to the teacher. The first instruction to the "vatu" is "You are a Brahmacharin. Water is your food. Do service. Don't sleep during the day time. Be devoted to the teacher and study the veda."

Travel :

In the 2nd Adhyaya, Kandika 6, when one is travelling by a chariot, Ashwalayana lays down that before mounting the chariot, one should touch the wheels with proper mantras besides the axle. While mounting, he should do it with the right foot first and thereafter touch the reins and if the horses do not have the

reins, then he should touch the horses themselves. When making use of a new chariot he ordains that it should first go round a known tree or a pool that does not go dry. While returning home he should fetch branches of a tree that bears fruits. This was how a new chariot was put to trial before being used.

Building a House :

In the same Adhyaya, Kandika 7 and 8 tell us how to examine the site and soil when a new house is going to be constructed. He states that the owner should dig a knee-deep pit and fill it again with the same soil that has taken out of it. If the soil reaches out of the pit, the ground is deemed to be excellent; if the soil comes to the level, then middle quality and if the soil does not fill in the pit, the ground has to be rejected as not suitable. Then there is another test : After sun-set, fill the pit with water and leave it overnight. Next morning, if there is water in the pit, the ground is excellent; if it is moist, it is of middle quality and if the pit goes dry, the ground has to be rejected as not suitable. Then Ashwalayana states, white ground with sweet taste with sand on the surface should be selected by a Brahmin, red ground by a Kshatriya and yellow by a Vysya.

In the third Adhyaya at the beginning itself, Ahswalayana lays down that one should perform, five "yajnas" every day. Yajna does not mean here a havan or a sacrifice. Anything done or given sacrificing one's selfishness and possessions is also called a sacrifice.

The "yajnas" are Deva, Bhoota (living beings), Pitras (manes or the departed souls), Brahma and human beings. He lays down that offerings made to fire is Deva, food offered to the living beings is Bhoota, Pinda offered to the ancestors is Pitras and the study of the scriptures every day is Brahma yajna.

In the fourth Adhyaya, Kandika 7, Ashwalayana mentions about the Shraddha to be performed when something good also has happened. As we have already seen, those were the days when there were no temples and idols. Shraddha need not be only for the forefathers. Something done out of abundant faith or shriddha becomes a Shraddha.

Those days, it appears, it was compulsory to study the scriptures on an ongoing basis as a part of worship to God throughout the life as against the modern day tendency of "I have completed my studies and now nothing more to learn." Under service to human beings, the uninvited guests had to be treated with due honour and respect, extending full hospitality. It was a duty cast on the householder to look after the welfare of the living beings in the neighbourhood by offering them food everyday. Kandika 8, the concluding one of the Ashwalayana Sutra gives an account of a sacrifice to Rudra when an ox had to be offered as a sacrificial animal. We need not comment on the offering, as in those days animals were offered at sacrifices without any restriction or fuss. The rulers themselves were performing great sacrifices like Ashwamedha.

At the end of this Adhyaya, Ashwalayana gratefully remembers his celebrated Guru, the great sage Shaunaka chanting his name twice.

Conclusion :

We have now come a long way from Ashwalayana and we should respect him at least for three things : a) As soon as the wedding takes places, the bride-groom establishes his new household taking his beloved to the new house with the nuptial fire. b) The newly wed couple should not act hastily and observe a sort of vrita and hasten slowly if the couple desires to have good offspring. He suggests celebacy of even one year by the couple if

they desire to have a 'rishi' as their son. A rishi is not an ordinary mortal. He acquires spiritual knowledge and supernatural powers through tapas and in the evolution of the soul a human being has to become a rishi or the enlightened soul before being elevated to the position of a god or a deity. c) Every householder should observe and perform everyday five yajnas in service of the living beings, human beings, God and the ancestors besides studying the scriptures on an on-going basis, Definitely there is no personal religion greater than this. Having said this we may also have to state that during the vedic times women were initiated into Brahma Vidya through Upanayanam and the chanting of the sacred Gayatri mantra, but Ashwalayana is not mentioning anything about this. Even for naming ceremony or others he says that for the girl child no mantras need be chanted which means, during his time the equal rights granted by the vedas to both men and women must have been withdrawn and women were occupying a secondary position though at the time of Mahabharata we come across with some powerful characters like Gandhari, Kunti or Draupadi.

However, Ashwalayana Sutra is a good document that tells more about the personal religion practised privately within the four walls of the house than the society that was in the process of constant change definitely with a view, approach and philosophy that a strong family is the building block of a strong society which in turn can make a strong nation. At least in this respect there are no two opinions. Then should the husband and wife not love each other even in the modern age ? The sutras of Ashwalayana have a great relevance in this respect and definitely they will remain so even in the future.

(There are other Grihya Sutras like Sankhyayana, Paraskara, Gobhila etc. but Ashwalayana is popular with Gowd Saraswat Brahmins.)

4. SARASWATS

Saraswat Brahmins, one of the five ancient Gowda Brahmins, the others being Kanyakubja, Maithila, Utkal and Gowda Brahmins, derived their name basically from the mythological River Saraswati that had flowed in the present Punjab and Rajasthan region from the Himalayas to the western sea near Dwarka in Gujarat. Even to-day it is believed that the river flows underground as detected by the remote sensing satellites. The river can also be seen in parts near the Lake Pushkar in Rajasthan, Sidhpur in Northern Gujarat and Somnath in Saurashtra. There is also a strong belief that in Prayag, Allahabad, flowing underground Saraswati joins Ganga and Yamuna as the 'Guptagamini' to form the triveni sangam. In the ancient times the Saraswati Valley was known as Brahmavarta and this happened to be the cradle of the vedic civilisation, when the Saraswats were the respositories of the vedic lore. According to the story depicted in Mahabharata, Maharshi Dadhichi had a son named Saraswat whom the River Goddess Saraswati brought up. At a very young age, the mother taught all the four vedas. A severe drought overtook the Saraswati Valley and the residents left their homes in search of food and water. At that time, Saraswati persuaded Saraswat to stay back and pursue his studies and provided him with food and shelter for his sustenance. The famine continued for twelve long years. The Brahmins lost all their spiritual wealth and it was the young Saraswat that gave the world back the holy word preserved by him at the instance of his mother. Saraswat taught 60,000 Brahmins keeping them in his 'gurukula' when prosperity returned and it is stated that even to-day such a huge university is not available where one single teacher has imparted all knowledge. Saraswat Brahmans regard Saraswat as their 'mool-purush'.

A king from the Saraswat country called Videgha Mathava with his preceptor, Gautama Rahugana set out eastwards to find out new pastures. In those days fire was to be carried physically from place to place and the king carried a tiny spark on his tongue. On the way the preceptor started conversing with the king but the king was tightlipped without giving any reply for fear that the spark might fall or get extinguished. The preceptor understood the anxiety of the king and invoked Agni, the fire-god chanting vedic mantras calling him as "gritasnu". On hearing the glories sung in his praise, out came the flames of Agni from the mouth of the king and started rolling on the ground like the waves of the sea.

"Agnideva, what is thy command ?" the preceptor asked.

"Follow me ! "was the commandment of the fire-god. Accordingly they followed. The flames sped away eastwards through the Gangetic belt and on reaching the western bank of the River Sadaneera, vanished. The civilisation thus moved to the eastern part of the Bharat Khanda, later to be known as the Aryavarta and some of the families of Saraswat Brahmins moved to the east and settled down in Trihotrapura, a township in Gowda Desha and called themselves as Gowda Saraswats. About the journey from Saraswat country to the River Sadaneera a mention in made in the Shatapatha Brahmana and interestingly at the time of installation of Agni during havans and yajnas, Gautama Rahugana is remembered by us even to-day after remembering Vamadeva, a great name among Vedic rishis.

Lord Parashurama after reclaiming the land from the western sea invited various groups of Brahmins from different parts of Bharat Khanda. In response, ten families of Gowda Saraswats came down from Trihotrapura with their deities of daily worship and settled down in Gomantak-Goa, as stated in the Sahyadri Khanda of Skanda Purana. In gratitude even to-day, the Gowda

Saraswat Brahmins dedicate all their havans and yajnas be it Gayatri or Mrityunjaya to Lord Parashurama stating "Yajnantargata Bhagwan Shri Parashuramamurti priyatam."

The ten families in the course of time multiplied and as the time passed they took to trade and commerce in addition to officiating as priests. Starting from the 13th century A.D. on account of their different religious beliefs, the Mohammedans and Portuguese were ruthless to the Hindus, especially Gowda Saraswats and therefore they had to migrate to other parts of the country like the coastal belt of Karnataka and Kerala besides Maharashtra. In order to preserve their religious beliefs there came into being the four religious seats, Kaivalaya, Gokarna, Kashi and Chitrapur Maths. In fact Kaivalaya Math was founded much earlier in the eighth century itself in Goa by the celebrated Gowdapadacharya to stop the onslaught of Buddhism and this acharya happened to be the paramguru-grand preceptor of Adi Shankara of Adwaita fame.

Not all the Saraswats did migrate from the banks of the River Saraswati to the eastern India or Goa. Only one section called Gowda Saraswats travelled in this way. The others migrated to Kashmir called themselves, Kashmiri Pandits, Sind-Sind Saraswats, Punjab, Punjab Saraswats, Rajasthan, Rajastani Saraswats and Chitrapur, Chitrapur Saraswats etc.

This in a nutshell is the mythological and historical background of the Saraswat Brahmins.

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5 BRAHMINS

Vedic society was divided into four classes-Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras. The first mention of this division is made in the Purusha Sukta of Rigveda (10.90.12) wherein it is stated that at the time of creation, Brahmins came out of the mouth (face) Kshatriyas-shoulders, Vysyas - thighs and Shudras-limbs of the Purusha or the Lord Almighty. Stated differently these were the four classical divisions of the society. Shrimad Bhagawat Gita states that the Lord Himself created four 'varnas' depending upon the conduct (character or the qualities) and action (duties of the people) which means that the society was divided into four groups: Those who taught and preached were the Brahmins; those who were warriors, Kshatriyas, those who had engaged themselves in trade, commerce and agriculture, the Vysyas and those who served the first three classes were the Shudras. In addition, there was one more class called the panchamas including the hunters who lived near or in the forests living on hunting or fishing.

When the four primary groups were considered as parts or organs of the same body definitely they were treated with due respect as a man cannot move without limbs nor can he think of the life without thighs or limbs and this interlinkage had economic advantages also.

<u>Duties of a Brahmin</u> :

Brahmins were assigned with the duties of learning the holy texts, preserving them and then interpreting, propagating and teaching them depending upon the place, time and circumstances. There were no means to preserve by way of writing nor were there printing presses those days and therefore the society made use of the human brain to keep in memory the sacred books

which had hundreds and sometimes thousands of stanzas. Poetry lent itself easily for memorising and chanting melodiously to attract the attention of the people. A lot of hard work was needed to study and memorise and so a special cadre called Brahmins was required for doing this difficult job demanding a lot of mental power. Imparting education was free and was regarded as a sacred duty. Collection of fees or donations was prohibited and only after the completion of education one was required to pay "gurudakshina" which was not quantified in terms of money. Then, the gurukulas which were run by Brahmins were in fact residential schools where the students were required to study and work hard.

A Brahmin was supposed to be a "Shatkarmi" attending to six duties. They were Learning and Teaching, Performing and Officiating "yajnas", and Giving away and Receiving Gifts and Dakshina from others (Manu 1.88 and 10.75). Of these six actions the three actions of Teaching, Officiating at Yajnas and Accepting gifts and dakshina were the means of livelihood for the Brahmins and per chance if they were unable to bring in the minimum income, then Manu, the first lawgiver has granted certain exemptions which we shall see later. Basically the Brahmins were expected to study the scriptures and render the service to the society by way of education besides tendering sound advice to the people who sought for it. All this was a selfless service without expecting anything in return. If something was given he had to accept and if not, he was not supposed to ask. It was implied that a Brahmin should be basically a religious person having the comprehensive knowledge of Brahman, that is God. Without this knowledge he could not be called a Brahmin. Spiritual knowledge therefore is the very foundation on which a Brahmin's life is built up and therefore there is a very strict injunction that a Brahmin must not memorise and chant mantras

without understanding their meaning. It was but natural that to master one veda a period of 12 years was needed and there were persons who were spending 48 years in Brahmacharya to master all the four vedas.

With this educational back-ground and duties assigned to them the community of Brahmins was respected and held in high esteem and so a Brahmin was reverentially called "Bhoo-sura", a deity on the earth or a god walking on the earth. That was the respect and reverence he was commanding as he was capable of guiding both the king as well as the commoner and in the scriptures there was a commandment to the king to afford full protection both to the cow (cattle represents material wealth) and the Brahmin (representing spiritual wealth). A Brahmin is also called a Dwija or twice born, once from the mother's womb and then through "upanayanam" which gives him the necessary authority and skill to become a fullfledged Brahmin. It is only the "upanayanam" that opens up the door to the spiritual world and without this, a person by birth cannot claim to be a Brahmin.

Everyday Life:

A Brahmin is supposed to lead a strict and disciplined life throughout without any lapse or let up. We have already seen the commandments of Ashwalayana wherein he has laid down that the Brahmins have to perform everyday the "Pancha Yajnas". The same sage has given in his Sutras the code of conduct during the studentship. Besides the student, the teacher himself had to be a staunch observer of discipline as the teacher's behaviour and the attitude had a direct bearing on the students'.

In the days of yore, the Brahmins were not free to do whatever they wanted to do if they desired to remain on the top of the society or if they desired to command the respect of all. The respect came only because they deserved it and not because

they were in the clan of Brahmins. Looking differently, "Brahminism" if we term it so, is a way of life and to remain in the position of a Brahmin a lot of training, efforts, discipline and willingness to practise the tenets of "dharma" are required . One will not become a Brahmin by simply wearing a janwa or the marks of "bhasma" or "gopi-chandan". Actions and attitude towards the life and fellow human beings as well as all the living creatures make a man Brahmin or otherwise.

Manu has laid down various "Do's and Don't's" for Brahmins covering not only the daily routine, but also the food they have to take, company they have to keep and the approach and the attitude towards the life they have to have, so that they could be very good and exemplary citizens if not the teachers. According to him they cannot think of leading a luxurious life nor can they accumulate wealth without any limit. In sum and substance, they have to live for others and not for themselves.

Maharshi Bhagwan Vedavyasa's teachings are classical. From Chapter 15th to 19th in Kurma Purana, Shri Vyasa gives a number of "Do's and Don't's" which are relevant even to this day and quite a few of them are applicable to everyone irrespective of class, creed or community. They are universal in approach and application as well. A few of them are collected here for better understanding and appreciation.

<u>Studies :</u>

A Brahmin "snataka", or a bachelor who has just completed his studies must have studied all the four vedas or at least one or two of them. He must have studied not only how to chant but also the meaning. Now that his studies are over he must have proffered "guru dakshina" and with this he would be eligible for "samavartan" or the ceremonial bath and thereafter he would be ready to take up the duties of a householder or the "grihasta".

Dress :

The "snataka" will have two yajnopavitas, koupina, a beautiful and clean turban a bamboo stick in hand and a pitcher with water. He must have an umbrella and footwear. He must wear golden ear-rings, dhoti and uttariya or shawl which should be clean and the colour should be white. He must not put on colourful dress. He can make use of "sugandha" or scents of sweet smell and he must have an appealing personality. He must never make use of Kamandala, Padaraksha or the Maala used by others. Unless he is very poor he must never wear dirty or torn clothes.

Wedding :

Observing all the religious rites and rituals, he must marry a girl not belonging to his father's or mother's gotra. The bride should be suitable not only from outward appearance beautiful and auspicious looking but also free from diseases. She should be suitable from the family angle also. (But Mahabharata permits sagotra wedding after seven generations. This matter is however debatable.)

Offspring :

After marriage he should share the bed with his wife except on the days prohibited : He should also avoid the mithis of Shashti, Ashtami, Dwadashi, Chaturdashi and Poornima-the sixth, eighth, twelfth, and fourteenth day of the fortnight, besides the full moon day. This is in addition to the three days from the day of his birth.

Daily Routine :

Even after the marriage he has to continue the self-study of the Vedas and perform the "pancha yajnas"- the daily duties

as stated in the Grihya Sutras to which he belongs to. Worshipping God and affording protection and looking after his wife should be his prime concern. He must unfailingly wear the yajnopavita every day. He must devote his time in the welfare of the cow and the Brahmins besides serving his mother and father. He must constantly follow the tenets of "Dharma", "Artha" and "Kama" and worship the deities and bow before them with folded hands. He should regularly chant Gayatri Mantra, offer sandhyopasana and perform periodical "shraddhas".

Personal Qualities :

A Brahmin must not be cruel to any living being and never should he tell a lie. One must be honest throughout and Truth alone can conquer the world and Truth alone is the ultimate reality. What is a Truth? According to the sages, whatever is the real or whatever is the fact if it is stated accordingly then it is called truth and not otherwise.

A Brahmin should not speak harsh or arrogant words nor should be speak ill of others. He should not indulge in praising himself nor should he resort to criticising or insulting others. On no occasion he should criticise God or vedas.

A learned person should never try to get to know about the secrets of others and if he comes across, then he should keep them for himself. With his near and dear ones he should never enter into any arguments. In respect of the sins of others he should never speak nor debate and fully avoid making false allegations against innocent people as making false allegations is a serious sin that can destroy one's family and the wealth. In fact this sin has no propitiation at all.

Self-development: Treading on the track of "dharma" one must take care of his body. Without a healthy body one will not be able to understand Rudra (God) let alone attaining Him.

Without "Dharma" none should think of "Artha" or "Kama". One should not take the path of "Adharma" even if he is put to great hardships while observing "Dharma" as "Dharma" alone is God and provider of energy for the movement of all the living beings. A person who thinks ill of others or brings in the ruination of others cannot be called an intelligent or a "Dharmic" person. What is "Dharma"? Daya or mercifulness alone is Dharma. When one is in difficulties taking those difficulties as our own and showing compassion with a helping hand towards him, itself is "Daya" which is the basis of all "Dharma".

Dealing with the outside world : A Brahmin householder should make friends with people who are equal or superior to him. He should try hard not to cause any trouble to anybody and should avoid taking shelter from the lowly people or from the people who are extraordinarily intelligent. He should not show disrespect to the people who deserve respect. A word given or a promise made has to be kept up at all costs. One must not pick up quarrel and have animosity with a lot of people simultaneously and so also with friends and relatives.

A Brahmin must not speak to the wife or wives of others and he should not take food with his wife. He should never look at her when taking food, yawning or sitting in a relaxed posture as on such occasions she might look ugly.

More about his personality and income :

An intelligent person should never reveal anything about the "anushthan" (worship, prayers etc) to others nor can he conceal or to keep to himself the sins or lapses he has committed. Depending upon his living conditions, duties, possessions, knowledge and family background, he should put on the suitable dress. While speaking, he should speak carefully and softly and making full use of his intellignece he should attend to the worldly

duties. He must act according to the injunctions of the vedas and strive hard for taking examples from the great souls. If there is any problem or difficulty in following the scriptures then he must follow the path laid down by his parents and also the grand parents and by following their path one will never be in difficulties.

A Brahmin should never tell a lie nor should he speak ill of others. He must not beg from others even if he is weak or stricken with poverty. If he begs in the worst circumstances it should not be a daily routine and from one source only. He cannot beg from the same source for the second time. Even though he is in great difficulties he should never, never and never steal anything.

If he has adequate income, a householder should divide his income and wealth into five parts and spend them on Dharma, attaining Fame, Increasing and Multiplying his own wealth, Spending for one's own sake and family and the fifth part for the Benefit of his kith and kin or friends and relatives. He should be merciful and of forgiving nature throughout. He should keep himself away from the acts that bring him disgrace. He should not be carried away by the criticism from others, besides disrespect, allegations, violence and even the physical assault by someone on him. A Brahmin has to inculcate the quality of forgiveness.

To a Brahmin poison is not poison whereas money and wealth is. Therefore he should be extremely careful while garnering the wealth.

The society as a whole is cautioned not to give the Brahmin the gift of liquor. He himself cannot see, touch or drink alcohol. He has to keep himself totally away from liquor forever and if he does not do it, he will become a great sinner who does not deserve even to speak to while he is living and he will have to go to the Rourava hell after his demise. Therefore a Brahmin has to be

careful in respect of his food and drinks.

Manu states that if a Brahmin is unable to earn a living by the duties expected of him, then he can try with the duties of a Kshatriya and if there is no success then he take up the duties of a Vysya and at that time he can attend to only trade and commerce but not agriculture. Rearing cattle is permitted but agriculture is deemed to cause pain and harm to mother earth and the tiny creatures that live in the soil. Even in trade, there are restrictions. A Brahmin cannot deal in (sell) human beings, animals, salt, stone, sesame, food, mercury, medicines, coloured cloth, jute, fibre, wool, water, knife, poison, meat, milk, honey, curds, ghee, oil, wax, lac, jaggery, scents, birds, beasts, liquor, creatures living in water and animals with one hoof. (Manu 10.86 to 10.92)

In these commodities, the Kshatriyas and Vysyas can deal in whereas a Brahmin should not. The spirit is quite a few of them are supposed to be gifted free and should not be sold, for example food and water. And handling animals, birds and beasts need some amount of cruelty. Poison, knife etc are sometimes meant for destruction and a Brahmin whose life is dedicated for the welfare of all cannot think of causing harm to anyone. Well, if a Brahmin deals in these restricted commodities even for a period of one week he will be deemed to be a Vysya losing his position and title of Brahmin. (Manu 10.93)

A Brahmin is like a tree. Stand under the hot sun and give shadow and shelter to others.

Now can I call myself a Brahmin when comparing my qualities, possessions and actions to the ones given above ?

Everyone of us must honestly answer this question.

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6. LORD RAMA'S CORONATION

After winning the battle of Lanka, Lord Rama returned to Ayodhya with Mother Sita. On arrival, after a hearty welcome there were hectic preparations for his coronation. However, Lord Rama did not want to hasten and desired that the ceremony should take place at the most auspicious moment as earlier when he was about to be crowned as the 'yuvaraja' the events had taken such a harsh turn that he had to live in forest for fourteen long years.

Agreeing with his view Sage Vasishtha the preceptor, suggested that Saraswat Brahmins, the masters in every subject including astrology, living on the banks of the River Sadaneera could be invited to the royal court for consultations.

At once the royal messengers were sent out to the banks of the River Sadaneera. After reaching they enquired with a passerby where they could meet Saraswat Brahmins.

"Can't you see them?" he replied. "They are taking bath in the river".

The messengers went close and what did they see ? A small Brahmin boy caught a fish and with a blade of grass cut it into two halves. But an elder Brahmin snatched both the halves from the boy and shouted, "Stop this nonsense! How many times should I tell you not to trouble these innocent creatures ?" Then he chanted some mantras. As a result the halves re-joined and the dead fish sprang back to life. The Brahmin gently lowered and smiled when it swam away in the flowing waters of the river.

The boy clapped his hands merrily and then entreated, "Father, when will you teach me this mantra of bringing the dead back to life?"

Father smiled, "You shall learn it when you grow up, my boy."

Lord Rama's messengers were marvelled at the miracle and without further loss of time announced who they were and what the purpose of their visit was.

They were a small group of Saraswat Brahmins and they were thrilled that Lord Rama had invited them to Ayodhya. Going through the ablutions quickly they came to the banks. The messengers surveyed the Brahmins. They had 'yajnopavita' on their left shoulder, a loin cloth around the waist and their body was drenched in water. Leaving only the 'kaupina' they took out the loin cloth, squeezed it and using as a bath-towel wiped moisture from their body.

"O, venereble ones, will you please go home quickly, wear good clothes and come back early so that we can commence the journey at once ? We have brought the chariots yoked to the horses that gallop at the velocity of the wind."

The senior-most Saraswat Brahmin smiled. Wiping his body he modestly said, "We are Brahmins and our only wealth is our knowledge which cannot be measured by any yardstick like silk clothes or jewels. We do not possess even a second loin cloth. Then, we travel only by foot and do not use any other mode."

"Then it may take quite a few days for you people to reach Ayodhya if you do not travel by our chariots." The messengers stood disappointed.

"Don't you worry !" the elderly Brahmin in 'kaupina' finished wiping his body and squeezed the loin cloth to drain the water and then for the purpose of drying, spread it out facing the sun. The other Brahmins also followed suit and held out their loin cloth so that they could catch the warmth of the sun.

After a few moments, the messengers politely enquired, "How long should we wait, Oh, the respected ones ?"

"Why ?" the elderly Brahmin asked. "Don't wait any longer. Please board your chariots at once. Did you not say you can

travel at the speed of the wind ?"

"Yes," the messengers affirmed but were worried. "But, our Master, Lord Rama may not view this kindly. He may punish us sternly taking it as a serious lapse in allowing you, the venerable Brahmins to travel by foot and we, the servants by golden chariots ...."

The elderly Brahmin laughed heartily. With a smile he suggested, "Then we shall walk ahead and the chariots will follow us at the speed of the wind."

The messengers stood confused. When Brahmins would walk barefooted they should follow by chariots at the velocity of the wind ! Was there anything more absurd than this ? They looked at one another in utter disbelief.

The elderly Brahmin understood their mind. In order to instill confidence in them he threw up his loin cloth above his head and whispered a 'mantra' and lo, the piece of cloth without any support stood still over his head bringing in cool shadow. Now other brahmins did the same thing and soon all had their own loin cloth floating in the air without any support. The messengers were wonderstruck.

The elderly Brahmin called out, "Come on ! Let's start now for Ayodhya. The Lord is waiting for us and we should not delay any longer." With these words he loudly started chanting 'mantras' which others repeated. They took the first step which was virtually a leap and soon they were out of sight ! The messengers without loss of time boarded and drove their chariots to catch up with the speed of the Brahmins.

It was a rare sight for the people of Ayodhya to behold this band of Saraswat Brahmins racing towards the palace in 'yajnopavita' and 'kaupina' with their loin cloth floating over their head acting as an umbrella. Lord Rama on being told about the miracle, went to the terrace of the palace to see for himself the unusual sight which was unheard of so far.

On reaching the gates of the palace, the Brahmins stopped chanting and caught hold of their loin cloth in the air and wore neatly. As they entered the palace-gates with great humility, in a rare gesture of respect to the Brahmins, Lord Rama himself welcomed with Mother Sita, the guests and sought their advice in respect of the most auspicious moment for his coronation.

The elderly Brahmin smiled and authoritatively said, "King, the right moment has arrived. Ascend the throne right now ! This is the most auspicious 'muhurat' called the 'abhijin muhurat'. If you are coronated now, your rule will become exemplary one and will be remebered so long as the mountains stand and the rivers flow on this earth. Don't delay !"

Without waiting for any formalities at once Lord Rama ascended the royal throne with Mother Sita. Befitting the joyous occasion the palace drums were merrily beaten and pipes were blown heralding the epoch-making "Rama Rajya" ....

(I had heard this anecdote from an elderly person decades ago while collecting material for writing the history of Mulki Temple but till now I have not been able to find out the exact source. Yet this is an inspiring story about our forefathers who, in the days of yore were the masters in all branches of knowledge and wisdom. They considered spiritual knowledge as their wealth and commanded the respect of the rulers. They had the power of locomotion and they were knowing the art and science of bringing the dead back to life. Even to this day the 'abhijin muhurat' when the sun is in its zenith is regarded as the most auspicious moment and the incidents narrated in this tale linking to Lord Rama's coronation cannot be easily brushed aside as imaginary -The Author)

Who is a Saraswat ?

A Saraswat is

Sincere in his duties

Always devoted to God

Religious in everything and

Anxious for the welfare of his fellow beings;

Soft spoken and never harsh

Willing to work hard for the common-good

Amenable and friendly at all times, and finally

Trustworthy and dependable to the core.

– K. G. Mallya

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Lord Savita's Message

If you want to be
Out of debt and trouble
Don't you play dice
Never should you gamble.

Don't you get drunk
That will bring you ruin
Thrown out, will you be
By your kith and kin.

Don't drink and gamble
Work on your farm and field;
Garner wealth this way
Satisfied with the yield.

Working hard you earn
Wealth that makes you good,
Family and your people
Then love and cheer you loud.

(Based on Mandala 10, Sukta 34, Rig Veda)

About the Author

Shri K. G. Mallya is the retired Deputy General Manager of Syndicate Bank having banking experience of more than four decades. He is a freelance journalist, author and a poet in Konkani, Kannada and English languages. His published works in English include, "The Goddess of Wealth" (Novel), "Dinner with a Demon" (Short stories), "The Tale of Kishkindha" (Narrative poem), "Our Seventh Fleet" & "Golden India", (collection of poems), "The A.B.C. of Bank Credit" & "Beyond the NPA", (Essays on Bank-lending), "Adbhuta Ramayana" (Translation), "Mookajji's Dreams" (Condensation of Jnanapeeth Prize-winning Novel) and also "We the Bankers" (Novel), "The Merchant of Bombay" (Novel) and "The Statue of Mahatma" (Novel also translated in Hindi). Further he has authored a biography - "The Sage of Shambhavi" and pensketches - "Dwaraka", "Gayatri", "Panchavati", "Amrit" and "Shri Vyasa".

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Born in the year 1939 in Kinnigoli, Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka State, he is a Master in Commerce and also a holder of Diploma in Banking both of the Indian Institute of Bankers, Bombay and The Institute of Bankers, London.

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